

# Soak up the sounds and message of Project 365 and you could win

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A HOST of prizes donated by local businesses have added even more incentive to catch a performance by the band U Can Cry at the Wangaratta Performing Arts and Convention Centre this May.



All those who purchase tickets to the Mother's Day matinee show, to be staged at the WPACC from 2pm on May 8 - the day after the opening night performance - will enter a draw to share in more than \$2500 worth of fantastic prizes.

U Can Cry comprises 15 locals with varying degrees of musical and administration experience who have come together, as part of the Project 365 initiative, to raise awareness of mental health issues in the community, and to spread the message that 'it's okay to not be okay'. The group is working towards the two shows in May (a year since the first meeting to arrange the event - hence the name Project 365), having added the second show in December due to demand.

Band members have been busily preparing their versions of songs by artists including INXS, Cold Chisel, Powder Finger and John Mayer, and are looking forward to sharing them with audiences.

Proceeds from ticket sales and fundraising around the event will be donated to the Into Our Hands Community Foundation, which invests in projects and initiatives aimed at building North East communities, with Project 365 hoping to raise \$20,000 for the foundation. Local OAK FM radio identity and psychologist Neil Barassi will MC the shows, and Project 365 hopes the performances will be a huge community gathering over the weekend to start important conversations in the community about mental health and wellbeing.

Though he's reluctant to take the spotlight from his bandmates, Wangaratta resident and music lover Peter Rourke was the instigator of the project, which emerged from his own battle with depression.

Struggling through a particularly low day last year, Pete was visited by good mates including Rob Humphreys, who suggested he take a break from work to focus on his mental health.

During that time off, while lying awake one night, Pete felt he needed to do something to help himself and others battling the 'black dog'.

"I love music, and this idea started to form," Pete said.

"I thought music would be a perfect platform, because it's often what gets me through."

"When I woke up that morning, I made a few phone calls, and within about four hours we already had 10 people in the band, and I didn't have to twist one arm."

The line-up, ranging in age from their late 20s to late 50s and 60s, has grown to 15, which includes vocalists, drummers, a violinist, guitarists, a bass player, keyboardist, saxophonist, trumpeter and a banjo player.

In addition, they now have an administration person who structures their rehearsals, dots the i's and crosses the t's.

"COVID has given us our challenges which at times had us making really hard decisions to finalise the landscape of the band, but as a collective we got through it," Pete said.

"There are so many layers to it now, because so many people have got behind it, including author Bronte Spicer, who will promote her book 'It's Okay to Cry' at the shows.

"This project is a lot to pull together, but for people who suffer from mental health issues, getting out of bed is a challenge, so pulling this together is not really a struggle at all."

Pete said he found it hard not to become emotional when discussing mental health issues.

"It's a thing that eats at you from the inside out, and I know there are people out there who are struggling," he said.

"Several band members have experience of it, have dealt with it or have family members who do, and we've said that we just want to get this message out, we want people to not be afraid to open up. It should be okay for anyone to ask for help.

"I wanted to make this a community conversation, and an ongoing thing, so that if people walk out of our show, as well as having had a great time, they may think, 'Actually, I do need some help', and they'll know where to go.

"If we can make one person feel better that weekend, it will be worth it."

The Grit and Resilience Program, a communitydriven four-year project aimed at uniting locals and building strength, courage and connection in the Rural City of Wangaratta, is supporting Project

365 financially, including providing the WPACC for the show and some lead-up preparation.

Sarah Blatchford, Grit and Resilience Program community connector officer, said Project 365 was exactly what Grit and Resilience was all about.

"It embraces everything we want to achieve - creating connections and raising awareness of mental health and wellbeing," she said.

With tickets sold out for the May 7 show, Pete is hoping the Mother's Day matinee the following day will be a chance for families to gather for lunch before attending the performance, or dinner afterwards, to share the message that emanates from the performance.

“I encourage people to reach out - do it today, and come to the show knowing you’ve reached out, because just look what can happen if you do,” he said.

For more information, follow Project 365 Wangaratta ‘U Can Cry’ Facebook page.

Ticketing information is available on the WPACC website at [https://www.](https://www.wpacc.com.au/whats-on/ucan-cry-project-365)

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